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## Regional Autocratic Linkages and Regime Survival

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REGIONAL AUTOCRATIC LINKAGE AND REGIME SURVIVAL

*Abstract:* In this paper we analyse the effects of regional autocratic linkage on the survival of autocratic regimes. Scholars have suggested that regional factors shape regime survival through processes of diffusion. However, in most accounts, diffusion is simply derived from characteristics of the region. In contrast, we argue that it is the actual linkages between countries that must be examined. Regional political, economic, and social ties between autocratic regimes create domestic and external stakes in the regime, counterweigh democratisation pressure, and facilitate autocratic learning. We employ the volume of trade, migration, and diplomatic exchanges between autocratic regimes within a region as proxies for regional autocratic linkage, and assert that regional autocratic linkage is on the rise. Applying Cox survival models on a dataset of regional autocratic linkage and regime survival between 1946 and 2009, we find that regional autocratic linkage significantly reduces the likelihood of autocratic regime breakdown. These effects hold when the proportion of autocratic regimes within a region is controlled for, suggesting that we must look beyond the characteristics of the countries within a region and focus on the ties and linkages between them.

Introduction

Research on authoritarian survival has increasingly looked to the international sources of autocratic stability. Processes of diffusion and cross-border learning have influenced the strategies of many autocratic elites, as leaders learn from and react to challenges to authoritarian rule abroad in ways that strengthen their position at home (Ambrosio, 2010; Heydemann & Leenders, 2011; Weyland, 2014). Scholars have also pointed to the role of ‘Black Knights’, international sponsors who seek to bolster the power of domestic autocrats through various forms of diplomatic, economic and military assistance (Ambrosio, 2014; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Tolstrup, 2015). Even policies that are designed to hurt or undermine autocratic regimes, such as targeted sanctions and other forms of enforcement, have been shown to reinforce the position of incumbents in some settings (Escriba-Folch & Wright, 2015; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014; Peksen & Drury, 2010).

Many of these international influences have a regional dimension (K.S. Gleditsch, 2002), and scholars have demonstrated that the prospects for autocratic stability within any one

country depend in part on the characteristics of the region in which the country is situated. Regional clusters and alignments shape the potential for regime stability and change in systematic ways. Factors such as the proportion of democracies in the region, the occurrence of regime transitions in neighbouring countries, and the role of regional international organizations, have been shown to influence the likelihood of regime change (Gasiorowski, 1995; Pevehouse, 2005; Starr, 1991). In this article we examine a form of regional influence – regional linkage – that has been under-explored, but that has important consequences for autocratic stability. International linkages have been shown to influence the stability of political regimes in systematic ways. Levitsky and Way's important work has highlighted the importance of 'linkage to the West' in undermining authoritarian rule and fostering the conditions for democratic transitions (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Recent scholarship has also shown how linkage to non-western powers can reinforce autocratic rule at the expense of democratic movements (Sasse, 2012; Tolstrup, 2013a; Vanderhill, 2013) and that ties between authoritarian regimes reduces the likelihood of autocratic breakdown (Tansey et al., 2016). To date, however, scholars have yet to examine systematically the effects of autocratic linkage on a regional level. As many international effects are concentrated at the regional level, do regional international linkages have implications for domestic politics?

In this article we offer new insights into the role of regional linkages and their impact on autocratic survival. We identify trends and patterns in regional linkages across three key dimensions – trade, migration, and diplomatic ties. We show that levels of linkage do not directly follow from more or less autocratically dominated regions; autocratic linkage is largely independent of the density of autocratic regimes within a region. We then employ survival analysis techniques to evaluate the impact of regional linkage on the prospects for

autocratic breakdown.<sup>1</sup> We find strong evidence that regional linkage across all three dimensions reduces the likelihood of autocratic regime breakdown (although the effects of trade and migration linkage are more robust than the effect of diplomatic linkage). Importantly, we also find that the effects hold when controlling for alternative indicators of autocratic connections: the proportion of autocracies in a country's region and the intensity of autocratic linkage outside a country's region.

The paper proceeds in four sections. The first section reviews the literature on the international influences on authoritarian rule, with a particular emphasis on the role of regional-level variables. The second section sets out our theoretical arguments concerning the relationship between regional linkage and autocratic survival, and offers a number of testable hypotheses. The third section examines the trends in regional linkage over time and across linkage dimensions and regions. The final section provides the statistical analysis and presents the findings about the impact of regional linkage on the prospects of autocratic survival.

**Regional Regime Dynamics and International Linkage**

The past decade has seen a surge of research into in the politics of authoritarianism (Art, 2012; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Morse, 2012). For many years, theoretical approaches to the subject concentrated on domestic-level politics to account for the resilience of authoritarian rule. Research addressed the strategies that incumbent elites use to maintain their rule, including the use of coercive repression, elite co-optation and legitimacy-seeking behaviour (Escribà-Folch, 2013; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014; Gerschewski, 2013;

<sup>1</sup> Note that we do not equate autocratic breakdown with democratisation. Autocratic regimes can be replaced not just by democracies, but also by other forms of autocratic rule, and we focus on the impact that linkage can have on the survival of individual autocratic regimes rather than on transitions to democracy.

Wintrobe, 2007). Scholars focused especially on the ways in which autocrats used political institutions such as parties and legislatures to manage rivals and maintain ruling coalitions (Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Lust-Okar, 2006).

More recently, scholars have examined the role that international forces can play in shaping the domestic politics of authoritarian rule. Just as the study of international politics shed light on the prospects for, and processes of, democratization (Pevehouse, 2005; Whitehead, 1996; Youngs, 2001), so too has it highlighted important aspects of authoritarian resilience. Much of this work has focused on the role that individual states play in sponsoring autocratic regimes abroad, including both authoritarian powers such as Russia and China as well as democracies such as the United States (Bader, 2015; Brownlee, 2012; Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010; Tolstrup, 2013b). However a number of findings about the international influences of authoritarian rule can be found in the literature on regional diffusion. While much of this work sought to explore the determinants of democratisation, it sheds considerable light on the regional sources of autocratic stability.

Multiple authors have identified regional clusters of political regimes, as well as regional waves of regime transitions, and have identified a number of potential regional-level explanations (K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006; Huntington, 1991; Starr, 1991; Weyland, 2014; Whitehead, 1996). Several authors have pointed to the importance of a country's immediate neighbours. Starr's research suggests that democratic transitions that take place in a state's neighbouring countries can increase the chances of democratisation in the state in question (Starr, 1991). Kopstein and Reilly show that the level of democracy in 'physically contiguous neighbors' plays an important role in determining the level of democracy (or autocracy) in individual states in the post-communist world (See also Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; Kopstein & Reilly, 2000). Other scholars have emphasised the political landscape of the wider region, and not just immediate neighbours. Gasiorowski considers the proportion of countries that are

democratic in the region as a whole, and finds that more democratic regimes are associated with a reduced risk of democratic breakdown (For an alternative finding, see Bernhard et al., 2003; Gasiorowski, 1995). Gleditsch and Ward use a combination of regional measures, including neighbourhood transitions and the proportion of democracies within a 500km radius (K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). Some scholars have also used regional dummy variables to take into account the location of a state within a particular region (Bernhard et al., 2001; Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; Ulfelder, 2007). Finally, Pevehouse has shown how regional international organisations can contribute to democratic transitions and consolidation, especially if those institutions are comprised of primarily democratic members (Pevehouse, 2005).

The theoretical logic of much of this existing research emphasises the role played by cross-border diffusion among closely connected states (Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; Bunce & Wolchik, 2006; Elkins & Simmons, 2005; K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006; Starr, 1991; Weyland, 2010). Kopstein and Reilly point to the importance of ‘the spatial diffusion of influence, institutions, norms, and expectations across borders’ (Kopstein & Reilly, 2000, p. 2). Beissinger observes that diffusion rests on a sense of interconnectedness within particular regions, which promotes monitoring across borders and gives rise to perceptions of analogous and comparable circumstances. Events abroad, such as mass protests or regime transitions, are taken to hold lessons for how politics is likely to unfold at home (Beissinger, 2007). Regional proximity and connections allow information to travel across borders, facilitating emulation (or avoidance) of political behaviour witnessed elsewhere. Yet while the existing research on the regional effects on regime stability offers many important insights into these processes, scholars have rarely analysed the causal processes directly. Several studies that theorise about the role of regional connections and linkages do not measure such connections empirically, and instead examine the distribution of regime types or the frequency of regime transitions

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2  
3 within a given region (Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006; Kopstein &  
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5 Reilly, 2000; Starr, 1991).  
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7 We argue that it is insufficient to take into account the geographical proximity of countries  
8  
9 within a region without examining the political links *between* those countries. Some countries  
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11 within the same region may be highly interconnected, while others may have limited contact  
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13 or political affinity. Simply examining the characteristics of the region – the proportion of  
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15 autocracies, the size of regime clusters, or the prevalence of regime transitions – does not  
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17 capture the nature and depth of connections that regimes have with one another. For too many  
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19 scholars, however, the association of such characteristics with patterns of regime change is  
20  
21 taken as evidence that diffusion is taking place. There is an assumption that diffusion  
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23 *automatically* takes place across countries within regions. However, whether diffusion will  
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25 occur depends crucially on how dense regional autocracies are interlinked. If linkages are low,  
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27 dramatic events in neighbouring countries may not leave any meaningful mark. By contrast, if  
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29 linkages are high, diffusion of ideas, practices and institutions will be considerably more  
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31 likely.  
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36 Consequently, we seek to build on existing work by systematically examining a variable  
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38 that to date has been ignored: the role of an autocratic regime's linkages with other  
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40 autocracies in the region. This allows us to examine the actual connections that autocratic  
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42 states have with one another within a region, rather than looking at the characteristics of  
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44 individual countries across the region and inferring connections between states from the  
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46 nature of the wider region. In particular, we examine the relationship between regional  
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48 autocratic linkages on one hand, and the survival of autocratic regimes on the other.  
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51 This approach builds upon recent research into the role of international linkages and their  
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53 effects on regime survival. Levitsky and Way's important work on competitive authoritarian  
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55 regimes demonstrated that 'linkage to the West' played a crucial role in fostering  
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democratization in hybrid regimes. The ties and interconnections between these states and Western powers constrained autocratic incumbents, limiting their room for manoeuvre due to Western scrutiny and creating incentives for domestic actors to mobilise for democracy (Levitsky & Way, 2010). However, a number of scholars have subsequently highlighted the role that international linkages can play in reinforcing rather than undermining authoritarian rule. Brownlee, for example, shows that linkage to the West can be instrumental in ‘preventing democracy’, and traces the history of the relationship between the US and Egypt and Washington’s role in bolstering authoritarian rule in Cairo (Brownlee, 2012). Several scholars have shown how linkage to non-Western states, such as Russia, China and Iran, can strengthen authoritarian rule in certain settings (Cameron & Orenstein, 2010; Sasse, 2012; Tolstrup, 2013b; Vanderhill, 2013). In recent research, Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz (2016) have also shown that there are important differences between linkages between democracies and linkages between autocracies, and have demonstrated that autocratic linkages contribute to more durable autocratic regimes.

Yet while research on international linkages has shed important light on the international sources of authoritarian resilience, it remains relatively under-developed. Most scholarship on linkage focuses on ties between a small number of key states, and there is only limited work that systematically examines linkage cross-nationally and over time. There has also been no systematic study of regional linkage as distinct from international linkage in general. This is problematic given the important role that regional dynamics have been shown to play in politics in general, and regarding regime stability in particular. Consequently, we should not stop at analysing global patterns, as they may obscure important regional variation (K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006, p. 916). Although Levitsky and Way do point to cross-regional variation in linkage (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 36), they focus primarily on the linkage that individual countries have to Western states and international organizations beyond their own

region. By contrast, we focus on effects of intra-regional linkages among autocratic countries, and examine all major regions of the world. In the next section, we discuss the reasons that autocratic linkage may have particular implications for the durability of autocratic rule.

### **Mechanisms of Regional Linkage**

Why might regional autocratic linkages affect the stability of autocratic regimes? We identify four causal mechanisms that tie autocratic linkage of all kinds to prolonged autocratic survival. First, autocratic linkage may provide strong incentives among domestic actors to maintain the status quo and avoid any change of regime that would threaten existing foreign ties. If key members of the ruling coalition depend on revenue streams from autocratic allies, they will wish to maintain the status quo and avoid political reform that significantly changes the country's international relationships and external revenue sources. Second, the more autocratic linkages a regime has, the lower the prospects that it will be subject to democratic enforcement measures when it engages in autocratic behaviour. While 'linkage to the West' may increase the probability that Western states will both notice and take action against government abuses of power (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 45), autocratic linkages are unlikely to have such effects. Third, autocratic linkage also increases the likelihood that external actors will actively support autocratic incumbents in times of crisis. Foreign autocracies have a particular reason to fear regime transitions in autocratic countries with which they have extensive cross-border ties due to the risks of diffusion (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011). Autocratic linkage thus creates a foreign constituency with an interest in stable authoritarianism in a way that democratic linkage does not, and autocratic regimes with high levels of autocratic linkages are more likely to receive cross-border political support in times of crisis. Finally, just as close autocratic linkages can enable fear of contagion to spread, so too can they

facilitate processes of elite learning and emulation associated with diffusion. Incumbent elites with close linkages to other autocratic regimes will be more able to learn from, and cooperate with, foreign autocrats in ways that can prolong international survival (Ambrosio, 2010; Heydemann & Leenders, 2011; Koesel & Bunce, 2013). Such patterns of learning and emulation may include a role for ideology – high levels of autocratic linkage can make it easier for ideology-driven foreign policies to have an impact from one country to another. Primarily, however, we argue that the influence of autocratic linkage is due to pragmatic consideration of the incentive structures that such cross-border ties create.

We argue that these mechanisms are likely to be amplified at the regional level. As Mainwaring and Perez-Liñán argue, regions have particular political dynamics and often demonstrate different causal patterns from one another (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2005). We thus expect to see linkage patterns vary across regions. Yet, regions are also often characterised by diversity and intra-regional variation, and our focus on linkage patterns allows us to explore the ways in which intra-regional linkage patterns affect different states in different ways. We do not argue that a regime’s location within a particular region is key, but rather the type of linkage relationships it has with other states within its region. The central importance of region is that it amplifies the effects of autocratic linkage on patterns of autocratic stability.

We argue that the effects of autocratic linkage may be heightened at the regional level for a number of reasons. High levels of regional linkage are particularly likely to reduce the extent of democratic enforcement a regime is exposed to as such enforcement is often driven by regional organizations. Regional international organisations are crucial actors in promoting and enforcing democratic norms of practice, and have contributed to democratic transitions from authoritarian rule in a wide range of settings (Donno, 2013; Pevehouse, 2005; Vachudova, 2005; Youngs, 2001). Yet the greater the extent of regional connections among

autocratic regimes, the lower the likelihood that regional organisations will be committed to enforcing democratic behaviour and punishing authoritarian regimes. Pevehouse has shown that the ‘democratic density’ of regional organisations matters for the enforcement of democratic norms of governance, and regions with high levels of autocratic linkage, such as the Middle East and East Asia, are much less likely to produce such organisations (Pevehouse, 2005).

Building on the regional diffusion literature, we also argue that fears of contagion that autocratic linkages may give rise to will be greater when those linkages are regional. Although patterns of emulation and diffusion can take place across regions (regime transitions in Southern Europe shaped subsequent developments in Latin America, while the experiences of popular mobilisation in Europe in 1989 informed subsequent events in Tiananmen Square in China), the potential for close connections among governments and the public are stronger at a regional level, where geographic proximity and common languages contribute to ease of communication and where individuals are more likely to develop a shared sense of interconnectedness (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñan, 2005). We thus share with much of the existing literature a concern with the role of regional diffusion, but argue that it is structured by regional linkage patterns. Regional diffusion effects are likely to be greater among highly linked regimes, rather than operating uniformly among geographically proximate regimes. Saudi Arabia’s response to the Arab Spring protests, for example, was not simply influenced by geographic proximity, as it chose to protect some neighbouring countries while seeking to undermine others. Rather, variation in its response can be accounted for in significant part by the channels of linkage Saudi Arabia shared with its autocratic neighbours: it intervened mostly robustly to support sitting incumbents in regimes with which it was most closely linked (Tansey et al., 2016).

Finally, and for related reasons, incumbent autocratic elites will find it easier to learn from the experiences of other incumbents within the same region. Regional proximity and connections make models of behaviour easier to witness and emulate (or avoid), so that regionally linked regimes will learn from one another particularly quickly. Such dynamics can clearly be seen in processes of elite learning within the Middle East, where geographically proximate and highly inter-connected countries enabled elite actors to rapidly learn from experiences elsewhere in the region and recalibrate their own strategies of survival (Heydemann & Leenders, 2011).

Consequently, we argue that while autocratic linkages in general are likely to contribute to autocratic survival, we should expect to see a strong regional component in this relationship. Even in autocracies with high levels of global linkage, strong regional autocratic linkages should make a difference. In other words, the effect of regional autocratic linkages should hold even when controlling for a country's linkages beyond the region.

Furthermore, as we have argued above, variation in levels of each country's regional autocratic linkages provides a more detailed picture of the regional dynamics of autocratic rule. It should have an effect on autocratic regime stability that goes beyond the mere regional density of autocratic regimes. In other words, the effects of regional linkage should hold even when taking into account the general concentration of autocratic rule in a particular region.

*Hypothesis: The higher the level of regional autocratic linkage, the lower the likelihood of autocratic regime breakdown. The effect holds when controlling for extra-regional autocratic linkage, and the regional concentration of autocratic rule.*

Before testing this hypothesis, we first examine trends in linkage over time and across the major regions of the world.

## Mapping Regional Linkage

The criteria constituting a region are rarely explicitly defined. As a result, the concept is rather inconsistently applied (Schmitt-Egner, 2002). The Oxford English Dictionary defines a region as “[a] land; a country; any large portion of the earth's surface considered as defined or distinguished from adjacent areas in some way, as by culture, government, topography, climate, fauna or flora, etc.” and “[an] area of the world encompassing several neighbouring states that, from an international standpoint, are considered socially, economically, or politically interdependent” (Oxford University Press, 2016). What becomes apparent from these definitions is that while the concept is primarily based on proximity, geography alone is not enough to specify a region’s boundaries. In determining which countries belong to a region – and, perhaps more importantly, which do not – factors other than geographic proximity become at least equally important. For example, Hettne proposes “five degrees of regionness” in which the principal criterion of proximity is complemented by evidence of a regional social system, organised cooperation, a distinct civil society, and regional identity (Hettne, B., 1999, pp. 11–19; Schmitt-Egner, 2002, p. 180). Keating stresses patterns of social interaction, such as travel (Keating, M., 1998, pp. 9–10). Schmitt-Egner asserts that regions are based on territory, but are essentially action spaces, characterised by some form of discernible programme, identifiable actors, and a structuring environment (Schmitt-Egner, 2002, pp. 182–184).

Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell have proposed a list of regions relevant for the study of regime change and democratisation that takes into account such multi-dimensional geographic and socio-political criteria, on which we draw for this study. The authors assign countries to regions according to “geographical proximity [...] and demarcation by area specialists having

contributed to a regional understanding of democratization" (Teorell et al., 2015a, p. 62). The authors identify ten world regions, eight of which are relevant for this analysis:<sup>2</sup>

1. Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Union
2. Latin America
3. North Africa and the Middle East
4. Sub-Saharan Africa
5. Western Europe
6. East Asia
7. South-East Asia
8. South Asia

These regions first and foremost combine countries that are geographically close. When it comes to drawing boundaries between regions, however, historical rather than geographical criteria are decisive. In line with much previous work, we are confident that this list of regions mirrors the crucial regional dynamics of regime change and is thus well-suited for an analysis of regional autocratic linkage.

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<sup>2</sup> Our data does not include autocracies in the Pacific and Caribbean regions because none pass the population threshold of 500,000 applied by the Correlates of War Project. For a list of countries constituting each of the remaining regions, see Table 3 in the Appendix. Note that we have altered the assignments in two regards: First, we case Cyprus and Turkey into the European category rather than the Middle East; second, instead of joining Western Europe and North America into a single category, we kept them apart. However, we reran our analyses using Hadenius and Teorell's original assignments, and our findings hold. Please refer to [enter website] for an online appendix, codebook, and replication files detailing the assignment of countries to regions.

Regional autocratic linkage refers to the entire spectrum of ties between autocratic regimes within one world region. Beyond formal alliances and high-level political cooperation, linkages cover the more subtle connections of the political, economic, and social sphere of two countries. Levitsky and Way emphasise the relevance of economic, intergovernmental, technocratic, and social information, and civil-society dimensions of linkage to the West (Levitsky & Way, 2010, pp. 43–44). Analogous to Western linkage, autocratic linkages are entertained through multiple channels. To approximate the complex multidimensional concept, we apply three indicators capturing linkage by trade, migration, and diplomatic ties. These indicators are by no means exhaustive of all facets of linkage. However, we are confident they are good representations of the economic, social, and political ties between autocratic regimes.

We construct our indicators in the following manner: First we delineate our sample of autocratic regimes using the well-known dataset provided by Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz (2014). For each autocratic regime in each year in the dataset, we compute the average trade volume as a proportion of GDP exchanged with autocracies within the region; the average number of migrants per capita of a country's population travelling to and from the autocracies in the region; and the average number of diplomatic envoys, weighted by their diplomatic rank, per capita of a country's population sent to and received from regional autocratic countries. We collect data on trade, migration, and diplomatic exchange from the Correlates of War Project's Bilateral Trade Database (Barbieri et al., 2009; The Correlates of War Project, 2012), the World Bank's Bilateral Migration Database (Ozden et al., 2011; The World Bank Group, 2015), and the Correlates of War Diplomatic Exchange Dataset (Bayer, 2006), respectively. All three datasets provide information on the basis of dyads of countries. We can therefore easily assign regime types and world regions to members of a dyad, and so



distinguish a country’s democratic and autocratic linkages within and outside the region in which it is located.<sup>3</sup>

Constructed in this manner, the indicators have advantages and disadvantages. Our measures capture actual connections between states rather than using proxies that capture only wider characteristics of the region, such as the distribution of regime types. Crucially, our measures capture linkage at the country-level, giving us fine-grained data about linkage patterns rather than overall regional averages. Our measures also allow us to compare the impact of different forms of linkage as well as considering the impact of linkage patterns as a whole. Finally, the indicators allow us to identify variation between autocracies with high and low regional linkages, relative to their size and economic capacity, while not being distorted by variation between regimes located in regions with very many or very few autocracies. Due to the aggregation of multiple regional linkages through the use of averages, an autocratic regime in a heavily autocratic region can have the same level of linkage as a regime in a region with only few other autocracies. In other words, the linkage indicators can be understood as measuring the degree to which autocracies live up to *potential* linkage relations, which are conditional on the number of autocracies in the region. Our measures will not ‘punish’ an autocracy for being located in a region in which autocratic rule is scarce.

Yet these measures also have some limitations, and we identify three important caveats. First, while linkage levels may change because of intentional foreign policy shifts, they may also change simply if other countries in the region democratise or turn autocratic. If

<sup>3</sup> For detail on the construction of our indices, please refer to the codebook and replication files available at [enter website]. Note that diplomatic ties and migration are recorded in five and ten year intervals, respectively. We resort to linear interpolation between measurement points to fill the gaps. With regard to migration, raw figures are interpolated on the country dyad-level. Regarding diplomatic exchange, aggregate country-level figures are interpolated.

autocracies in the region democratise, they will drop from the pool of potential autocratic linkage partners, and, due to the average aggregation, a country's linkage figures will change if linkage relations to that former autocracy were above or below average level. The same holds for new potential autocratic partners following democratisations. We do not consider this a problem, however, as we expect such 'passive' rather than 'active' changes in linkage will also affect an autocracy's survivability. The principal implication is that changes in linkage levels cannot automatically be regarded as the consequences of an individual autocracy's behaviour, but have to be interpreted in the light of regime changes in the region in question.

Second, our measures do not discriminate between a scenario in which a regime has strong relations with some autocracies, but feeble ones with others, and a scenario in which medium-intensity linkages are upheld with all. Which one of those two scenarios applies may have consequences for some of the mechanisms discussed above – but not for others. For example, where linkage generates external support, it might make a significant difference whether many or few partners come to the rescue. In contrast, domestic beneficiaries of autocratic linkage might not care much whether benefits come from one or many sources.

Finally, our indicators do not explicitly discriminate between linkages with strong and weak partners. This may have implications for the mechanisms of external support discussed above, as strong partners are likely to be able to provide much more effective support. However, it makes little difference to other mechanisms, such as the role of elite learning. Despite these caveats, we remain confident that our indicators will detect the crucial variation in regional autocratic linkages, and enable us to analyse the patterns and effects of regional linkage in a novel and comprehensive way.

Let us turn now to a descriptive analysis of regional autocratic linkage based on our three indicators. How has regional autocratic linkage developed over time? With the exception of

diplomatic linkage, regional autocratic linkage has seen remarkable changes in the past decades, and particularly appears to have increased dramatically in recent years. Figure 1 illustrates the overall development of regional autocratic linkage in the world since 1946 on our three dimensions, trade, migration, and diplomatic exchange. We plot the average regional linkage level of the world's autocratic regimes in a given year (the black line) and an interval of one standard deviation above and below the mean (the grey ribbon) to give an impression of the range of high and low linkage autocracies. On average, regional autocratic trade linkage has slowly but steadily increased until the early 2000s. In the most recent years of our observation period (i.e. between 2003 and 2009) the increase in regional autocratic trade linkage has accelerated rapidly. Maybe even more dramatic is the rise in regional autocratic migration. Average levels more or less stalled for three decades since 1960, before almost tripling between 1990 and 2000. Only diplomatic linkage seems to be settling on a lower level compared to the 1970s and 1980s.

[Figure 1 about here]

The recent upward trend of regional autocratic linkage is noteworthy. If, as we argue below, regional autocratic linkage stabilises autocratic regimes, a strengthening of regional linkage does not bode well for future democratisation. A rise in regional autocratic linkage suggests existing autocratic regimes may be more difficult to dislodge now than in the past. It is striking that the rise in regional autocratic linkage has taken place during a period when the overall number of autocracies worldwide has been declining (Møller & Skaaning, 2013). While a rise in autocratic linkage could in theory be simply the result of fluctuations in the number of autocratic regimes in each region (a rise in the number of autocracies might lead to rise in autocratic linkage without the need for any change in inter-state relations), the

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3 existence of such a pattern while the number of autocracies is declining suggests that the  
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5 remaining autocratic regimes are significantly increasing their ties with each other.<sup>4</sup>  
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9 [Table 1 about here]  
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14 As well as identifying trends in autocratic linkage over time, we also demonstrate that  
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16 linkage is independent of the share of autocratic regimes in the regime, a measure often used  
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18 as a proxy for regional influences on regime change. Table 1 shows correlations between the  
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20 proportion and number of autocracies in a region on the one hand and indicators of regional  
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22 autocratic linkage on the other. Strikingly, there is virtually no association. This finding  
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24 bolsters our argument that registering the concentration of autocratic regimes within a region  
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26 is not enough to fully appreciate the regional dynamics of authoritarian rule. It further  
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28 strengthens our expectation that each autocracy's individual level of regional autocratic  
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30 linkage will add to the explanation of regional dynamics of autocratic regime survival. While  
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32 the density or prevalence of autocratic regimes within a region has proven to have strong  
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34 influence on autocratic regime persistence,<sup>5</sup> we expect it to be only part of the story. Tracing  
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36 back regional autocratic diffusion to the sheer density of autocratic regimes within a region  
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38 misses out on the variety of inter-autocratic ties reflected by our indicators of regional  
39  
40 autocratic linkage.  
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49 <sup>4</sup> Note that while we display a regime's *average* autocratic linkage in Figure 1, the upward trend also reflects in  
50  
51 total figures.

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53 <sup>5</sup> Or rather has the density and prevalence of democratic regimes proven to have influence on democratisation  
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55 (Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006; Kopstein & Reilly, 2000; Starr, 1991). By  
56  
57 implication, the prevalence of autocratic regimes must make democratisation less likely.  
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**Regional Linkage and the Survival of Autocratic Regimes**

After having operationalised regional autocratic linkage we can specify our hypotheses:

*H1: The higher the average volume of trade as a proportion of GDP between an autocratic regime and all other autocracies in the region, and holding constant the average volume of extra-regional autocratic trade and the concentration of autocracies in the region, the lower the risk of autocratic regime breakdown.*

*H2: The higher the average number of migrants as a proportion of the population migrating between an autocratic regime and all other autocracies in the region, and holding constant the average volume of extra-regional autocratic migration and the concentration of autocracies in the region, the lower the risk of autocratic regime breakdown.*

*H3: The higher the average number of autocratic envoys an autocratic regime sends to and receives from all other autocracies within the region, and holding constant the average volume of extra-regional autocratic diplomatic ties and the concentration of autocracies in the region, the lower the risk of autocratic regime breakdown.*

We apply Cox proportional hazards survival model to test the three hypotheses. Our dependent variable is the time that passes before an autocratic regime breaks down. We do not equate autocratic breakdown with democratisation and thus rely on data provided by Barbara Geddes and colleagues to operationalise autocratic regime breakdown (Geddes et al., 2014). Geddes et al.'s data is particular in that it does not confine autocratic regime breakdown to instances of democratisation, but also captures the replacement of one autocratic regime by another. Geddes et al. record an instance of autocratic regime breakdown when the interest

group that has the ability to heave a dictator into power and keep him (or her) there changes. This more subtle measure of regime collapse fits our purposes well. A narrow focus on democratisation is likely to overestimate autocratic stability and underestimate the effects of regional autocratic linkage. Democratisation is much more demanding than the breakdown of individual autocratic regimes, and claiming an effect of regional autocratic linkage is a long shot. Autocratic linkage is likely to be outweighed by other, more important factors. Our argument is more modest than that.

We include a set of control variables that might confound the association of regional linkage and autocratic regime survival. Three of these control variables are particularly important for our argument: the level of regional democratic linkage, the level of extra-regional autocratic linkage, and the concentration of autocratic regimes within the region.

First, in all models we control for regional democratic linkage. Regimes with high levels of autocratic linkages might just be regimes that generally entertain dense regional ties, and it might be regional cooperation *per se* rather than specifically autocratic cooperation that strengthens autocratic regimes. Controlling for regional democratic linkages, we kill two birds with one stone: we implicitly hold constant overall (i.e., regime type-neutral) levels of regional linkage, while at the same time we are able to examine the effects of regional democratic linkages as opposed to autocratic ones.

Second, all models control for the effects of extra-regional autocratic linkage. High levels of regional autocratic linkage might simply reflect high general levels of autocratic linkage, regardless of whether they unfold within the region or without. By controlling for autocratic linkage outside a country's home region, we are able to isolate the two effects, and examine the added value of regional ties. We construct indicators of extra-regional autocratic linkage in a manner analogous to the one described above with regard to regional linkage.

Third, we control for two factors that can be understood as proxies of regional diffusion: the proportion of autocratic regimes (other than the target regime) within the region, and the number of autocratic breakdowns within the region in the past three years. These control variables play a crucial role in our research design. The proportion of regional democracies or autocracies and regime changes in the region have frequently been applied as measures of diffusion (for example Gasiorowski, 1995; K.S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). An effect of regional autocratic linkage might simply reflect the generally supportive environment of a heavily autocratic region. This regional balance is hampered in turbulent times with many regime breakdowns. However, we have shown in the previous section that the regional autocratic linkages of a country do not follow directly from an autocratic neighbourhood. We argue that political, economic, and social linkages can vary even in highly autocratic regions. Controlling for the regional proportion of autocratic regimes and the number of breakdowns allows us to determine the effect of regional autocratic linkage beyond the mere density of autocratic regimes in a region.

We include a number of additional controls suspicious of interfering with the relation between regional autocratic linkage and regime survival. All models contain the level of GDP per capita and its annual growth. Not only are these economic factors known to have strong influence on regime survival, they might also influence all three dimensions regional autocratic linkage. Economically strong and growing autocracies are likely to trade more and attract more migrants. Furthermore, GDP and GDP growth can be understood as indicators of state capacity. Well-functioning states might result in more stable regimes, and at the same time establish denser diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries. All models also include a dummy variable indicating the Cold War period. For many autocracies, the Cold War period was one of increased autocratic linkage, particularly to the Soviet Union, and of course it was also one of remarkably persistent autocratic rule. In the models on trade linkage we

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3 additionally include natural resource abundance and the global oil price to account for  
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5 exporters of gas and oil, which naturally have high trade levels and are known to have  
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7 particularly resilient autocratic regimes. Finally, we control the effect of migration linkage for  
8  
9 the level of internal armed conflict. Conflict-prone autocracies often have less stable regimes,  
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11 and at the same time armed conflict increases refugee migration to neighbouring countries.<sup>6</sup>  
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16 [Table 2 about here]  
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20 Table 2 shows the results of three Cox models, applying in turn the indicators of regional  
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22 autocratic linkage by trade, migration, and diplomatic ties.<sup>7</sup> The findings lend strong support  
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24 to our hypotheses. All three dimensions of regional linkage are statistically significant at the  
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26 five percent-level and negatively associated with the likelihood of autocratic regime  
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28 breakdown. In other words, the higher the levels of regional autocratic linkage by trade,  
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32 <sup>6</sup> GDP figures originate from Bolt and van Zanden (2013), figures on resource production from Ross (2013), and  
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34 conflict data are from Gleditsch (2002). All these are retrieved via the Quality of Government Dataset (Teorell et  
35  
36 al., 2015b).

37  
38 <sup>7</sup> We report the built-up of these models employing different constellations of control variables in the online  
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40 appendix to this article, available at [enter website]. Our findings are very robust to these alternative model  
41  
42 specifications. We further report results of the test for the appropriateness of the proportional hazards assumption  
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44 (Grambsch & Therneau, 1994). Where covariates violated the assumption, we followed best practice and  
45  
46 included interaction terms of the respective variables with a function of follow-up time (Box-Steffensmeier &  
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48 Zorn, 2001; Golub, 2008). Appropriate time functions were selected according to the best model fit following  
49  
50 Akaike's Information Criterion. Note that the original data on diplomatic relations undergoes slight changes in  
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52 the coding procedure for the periods between 195 and 1965, and after 1980 (see Bayer, 2007, p. 2). To safeguard  
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54 our analysis against distortions stemming from these coding specificities, we include a dummy variable  
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56 distinguishing the relevant periods (see also our codebook available at [enter website]). However, since this  
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58 dummy has no substantive meaning, we do not report it in Table 2.  
59  
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migration, and diplomatic ties, the lower the risk of regime collapse and the longer autocratic regimes tend to survive.

Figure 2 illustrates the effects of regional autocratic linkage on the likelihood of regime breakdown.<sup>8</sup> It shows the relative risk of regime breakdown (i.e. the hazard ratio on the y-axis) of autocratic regimes with different linkage levels (within the interquartile range realised in the dataset on the x-axis) when compared to a regime with no regional autocratic linkage at all. The left panel illustrates the effect of migration linkage, the middle panel the effect of migration linkage, and the right panel the effect of diplomatic linkage. For all three dimensions, the risk of autocratic regime breakdown drops constantly as the level of linkage increases. Strikingly, the magnitude of the effects is very similar across the three linkage dimensions: The effects of trade and migration linkage are virtually the same, while the effect of diplomatic linkage is slightly stronger. Note that the 95 percent confidence interval excludes a hazard ratio of one and thus indicates the statistical significance of the effect.

[Figure 2 about here]

Importantly, these effects have proven robust against controlling for three crucial factors: the level of regional democratic linkage, the level of extra-regional autocratic linkage, and the concentration of autocratic rule within a region.

First, the effects hold when controlling for regional democratic linkage. The effects of regional autocratic linkage are thus not just an effect of regional linkage *per se*, but are specific to linkages to autocratic regimes within the region. In contrast, democratic linkage

<sup>8</sup> The plots are from a simulation procedure (Gandrud, 2013; also King et al., 2000; see Licht, 2011) based on the models in Table 2 and show the median and inner 95 percent of one thousand simulations, two figures analogous to the point estimate and 95 percent confidence interval of the underlying regression models.

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2  
3 does for the most part not seem to influence the survival of autocratic regimes. The exception  
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5 is the indicator of regional diplomatic linkage with democracies, which significantly increases  
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7 the likelihood of autocratic regime breakdown (see Model 3).  
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9  
10 Second, the findings are robust against controlling for an autocratic regime's linkages with  
11  
12 other autocracies *outside* the region. Regional autocratic linkage is not just an indicator of  
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14 international autocratic linkages in general. There is a particular benefit to regional ties with  
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16 other autocracies, and this effect transcends influences of global autocratic linkage. In fact,  
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18 the indicators of extra-regional linkage in all three linkage dimensions, while negatively  
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20 associated with autocratic breakdown, are not significant. This auxiliary finding sheds new  
21  
22 light on previous work by Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz (2016) which asserted an autocracy-  
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24 sustaining effect of global autocratic linkages. Apparently, much of this effect of worldwide  
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26 autocratic linkages must be attributed to the strong influences of regional linkage.  
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30 Third, the effects of regional autocratic linkage are robust to the inclusion of indicators  
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32 used in other studies to detect diffusion effects. This finding supports our claim that regional  
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34 linkage, pointing to actual ties between autocratic regimes, transcends the effects of a more or  
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36 less heavily autocratic neighbourhood found by previous studies (Gasiorowski, 1995; K.S.  
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38 Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). In Table 2, we include the proportion of autocratic regimes in the  
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40 region and the number of autocratic regime breakdowns in the past three years, two frequently  
41  
42 applied proxies for diffusion.<sup>9</sup> Note that the proportion of autocracies within the region, much  
43  
44 in line with the findings of previous studies, significantly reduces the risk of autocratic regime  
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46 breakdown. Regional autocratic breakdowns, in contrast, exert no consistent effect; only in  
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54 <sup>9</sup> Note that most authors are interested in democratising effects of regional diffusion, and therefore use the  
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56 regional proportion of democracies. Of course the regional proportion of autocracies is an arithmetic equivalent.  
57

Model 3 do they significantly increase the likelihood of regime collapse. More important to our own argument, however, is the fact that the effects of our linkage indicators hold.

Finally, the detected linkage effects are robust to holding constant our additional control variables, GDP per capita, GDP per capita growth, the Cold War period, resource production and oil prices, and incidences of internal armed conflict. Of these, the indicator of GDP per capita has no effect. In contrast, GDP per capita growth significantly lowers the risk of autocratic regime breakdown. Interestingly, the effect appears to be stronger in older autocracies, indicated by the significant time-interactions in two of the three models. The Cold War period appears not to be responsible for significantly more stable autocratic regimes, its relationships are largely insignificant. Resource abundance, as has been shown in many studies, significantly stabilises autocratic regimes, while the global oil price has no effect. Finally, internal armed conflict appears to have a time-dependent effect, reducing the likelihood of autocratic breakdown initially and increasing it in older regimes.

**Conclusion**

Existing scholarship has demonstrated the importance of a range of international factors in shaping the politics of authoritarian rule, and regional variables have featured prominently. We have made a number of contributions to further our understanding of the regional influences on autocratic survival. Our measure of autocratic linkage improves on existing studies that focus on the characteristics of regions – e.g. the proportion of autocracies, the regional levels of democracy – by examining the links and ties *between* countries within the region. Much of the theoretical logic behind studies into the regional effects on regime politics assume rather than demonstrate linkages between states, especially with respect to diffusion processes. We move beyond crude measures of regional characteristics and

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2  
3 incorporate evidence of an important range of linkages between autocratic regimes. We also  
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5 show that such linkages are independent of the proportion of autocracies in the region, and  
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7 thus represent a distinct feature of regional politics. By shaping the incentive structures faced  
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9 by both domestic and international actors, autocratic linkages can create a set of elite interests  
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11 in the continuation, rather than breakdown, of autocratic rule.  
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14 Furthermore, we demonstrate that such regional autocratic linkages are intrinsically  
15  
16 important. We supplement existing findings about the role of international linkages by  
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18 showing that regional autocratic linkage increases the prospects of autocratic survival. Each of  
19  
20 our three measures of linkage – trade, migration, and diplomatic ties – has a statistically  
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22 significant effect on the survival time of autocratic regimes. Scholars interested in the effects  
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24 of linkage of domestic politics regimes must thus take into account not just linkages to  
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26 particular regions (e.g. the West) or to particular states (e.g. Russia or China), but also the  
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28 patterns of intra-regional linkage across the world.  
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31  
32 The implications of our findings are stark. Despite the decline in the number of autocratic  
33  
34 regimes since the end of the Cold War, regional autocratic linkage has increased in intensity  
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36 in recent decades, suggesting a firm tightening of inter-autocratic relations. As this form of  
37  
38 linkage contributes to the solidity of authoritarian regimes, we expect that the world's  
39  
40 remaining autocratic regimes will be more resistant to democratic pressures than autocratic  
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42 regimes have been in the past. Local democracy activists and international democracy  
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44 promoters must take these findings into account. Those who wish to loosen autocrats' grip on  
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46 power must not only challenge their domestic sources of authority, but also seek to weaken  
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48 their international ties to regional autocrats.  
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Appendix

[Table 3 here]

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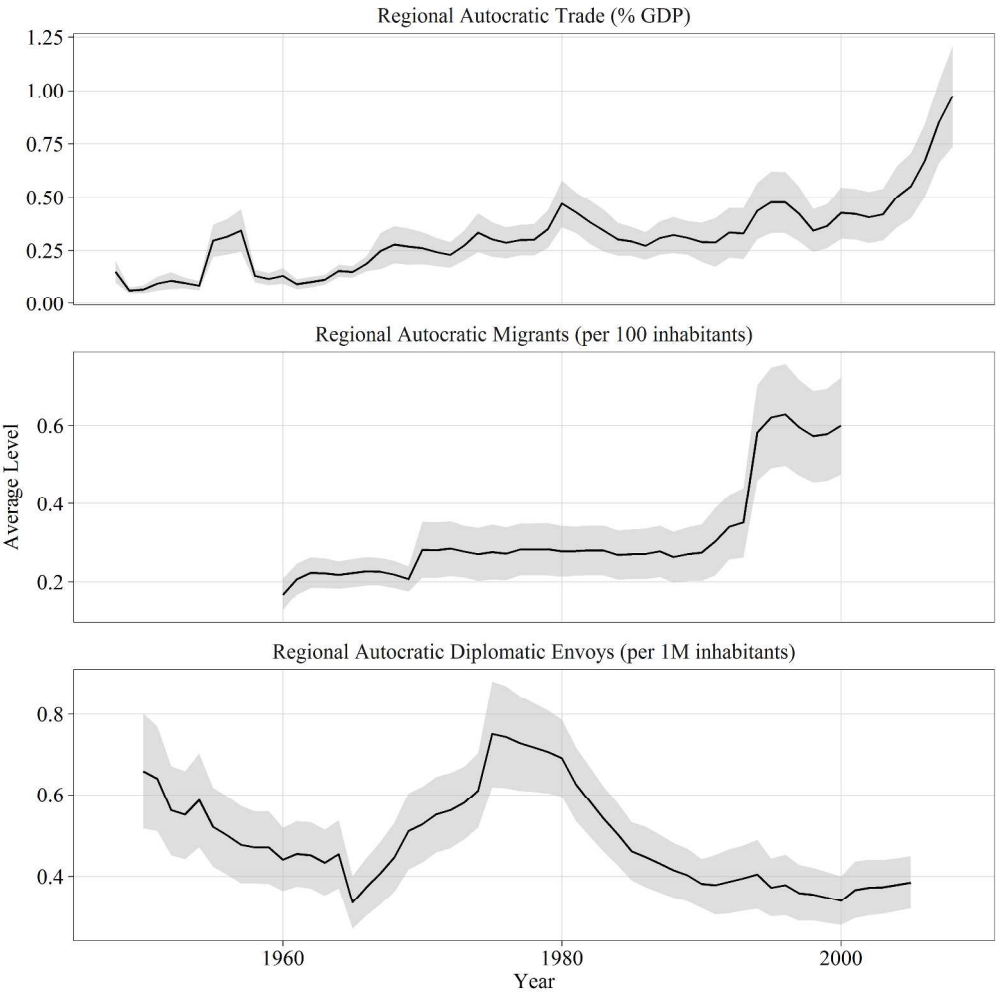


Figure 1: Average Regional Autocratic Linkage, 1946-2009  
Figure 1

	<i>Proportion Regional Autocracies</i>	<i>Number Regional Autocracies</i>
Average Trade per GDP	-0.006	-0.246
Average Migration per capita	-0.044	-0.123
Average Diplomatic Ties per capita	0.097	-0.089
Total Trade per GDP	0.122	-0.118
Total Migration per capita	0.108	0.181
Total Diplomatic Ties per capita	0.210	0.240

For Peer Review

	<i>Autocratic Regime Breakdown</i>		
	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Migration</i>	<i>Diplomatic</i>
	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>
Regional Autocratic Linkage	-0.444** (0.208)	-0.455** (0.212)	-0.429** (0.192)
Regional Democratic Linkage	-0.004 (0.071)	0.010 (0.079)	0.354*** (0.126)
Extra-regional Autocratic Linkage	-0.111 (0.240)	-0.127 (0.206)	-0.085 (0.160)
Proportion Regional Autocracies	-2.230*** (0.533)	-1.982*** (0.405)	-3.439*** (1.118)
Regional Autocratic Breakdowns (3 years)	0.056 (0.036)	0.051 (0.035)	0.119*** (0.040)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.038 (0.110)	-0.083 (0.119)	-0.108 (0.141)
GDP per capita Growth	2.662 (2.389)	-5.470*** (1.469)	2.434 (2.644)
Cold War	0.877* (0.531)	0.961 (0.705)	0.488 (0.360)
Resource Abundance	-2.002* (1.140)		
Oil Price	-0.0001 (0.004)		
Internal Armed Conflict		-0.943** (0.403)	
Proportion Regional Autocracies * f(T)	0.049** (0.021)		1.108** (0.472)
Growth * ln(T)	-3.782*** (1.138)		-3.349*** (1.164)
Cold War * ln(T)	-0.281 (0.191)	-0.370 (0.232)	
Internal Armed Conflict * ln(T)		0.415*** (0.136)	
Events	175	140	114
Observations	3,614	2,836	2,878
Log Likelihood	-745.621	-553.197	-458.725
LR Test	67.555*** (df = 13)	57.516*** (df = 11)	45.823*** (df = 11)

Entries are Cox regression coefficients with robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. Time function of time-dependent effect of Proportion Regional Autocracies linear in trade model, logarithm in diplomatic model. All covariates lagged by one year. Diplomatic model includes control discriminating periods of diverging coding (not reported), see footnote. Significance levels: \* < .1, \*\* < .05, \*\*\* < .01

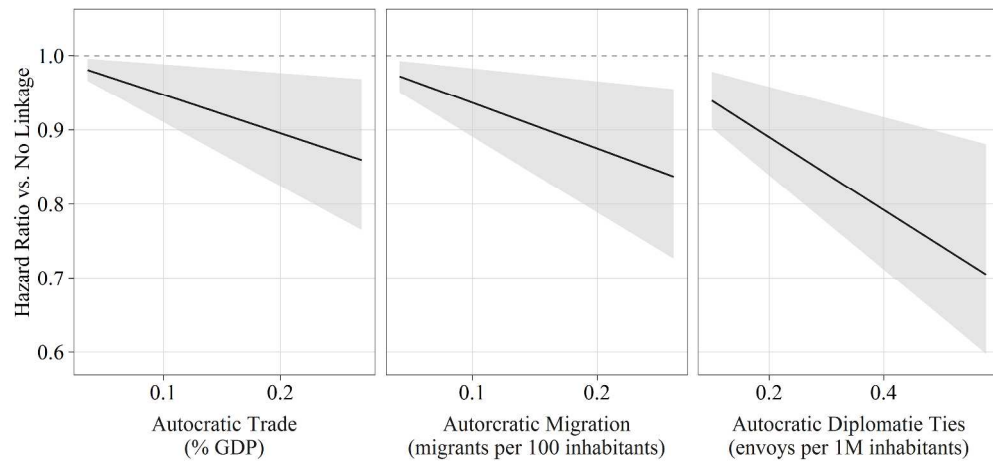


Figure 2: Simulated Effect of Regional Autocratic Migration and Diplomatic Linkage on Autocratic Regime Survival  
Figure 2

<i>Region</i>	<i>Countries</i>
Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Union	German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Russian Federation, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia
Latin America	Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay
North Africa and the Middle East	Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen Arab Republic, Yemen People's Republic, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman
Sub-Saharan Africa	Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Mali, Senegal, Benin, Mauritania, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Madagascar, Sudan
Western Europe	Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey
East Asia	China, Taiwan, North Korea, South Korea
South-East Asia	Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam, Republic of Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia
South Asia	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal